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ABSTRACT

At the end of every academic year, an alumni survey is administered to recent graduates of Boise State University, Idaho. A great deal of data has accumulated over time, with some covering a 10-year period. Data are available for 1992, 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2001. The smallest sample was 475 in 2000; the largest was 960 in 1995. Findings show that recent graduates have placed more importance on their careers and the skills that will make them employable. Recent graduates also thought that defining and solving problems and being able to draw conclusions from data were more important skills than earlier graduates did. Recent graduates placed less emphasis on developing original products or ideas and thinking objectively about beliefs. Recent graduates thought that Boise State had more impact on developing skills employers need than prior graduates did. In general, recent graduates were less satisfied with their departments than were earlier graduates. Although recent graduates have placed more emphasis on employment skills, they have not seemed as sure that the university is helping them gain these skills. This suggests that internships and courses that provide applications may be especially welcome to students. (SLD)

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Institutional Assessment
Boise State University

Have graduates' perceptions changed over time?

Research Report 2002-01
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Boise State University
January, 2002

Currently, at the end of every academic year, an alumni survey is administered to recent graduates. A great deal of data have now accumulated over the life of these items, some covering a ten year period.

While the survey covers a variety of areas, of particular interest are the items where graduates rate the importance of a variety of outcomes or skills in their efforts to be personally and professionally successful in today's world. For these same outcomes/skills, graduates also rate how much impact Boise State had on their attainment. Another series of items ask graduates to rate their major program or department on topics such as faculty members concern with student welfare, their availability, and teaching ability; course content; and general satisfaction with their major as measured by their willingness to enroll in the same major again and recommend the major to friends with similar interests.

The table below displays the years of survey administration, who was included in this analysis, and areas covered by that particular survey. For the departmental items, the time span is now ten years. For the impact and importance items, the survey covers seven years.

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Year survey was administered[1]	Who was included	What areas were included
1992	Baccalaureate graduates from 1990-91 and 1991-92 (N of responses=677)	Departmental items only
1995	Baccalaureate graduates from 1992-93 and 1993-94 (N of responses=960)	Importance of outcomes Impact of BSU on outcomes Departmental items
1997	Baccalaureate graduates from 1994-95 and 1995-96 (N of responses=858)	Importance of outcomes Impact of BSU on outcomes Departmental items
2000	Baccalaureate graduates from 1998-99 (N of responses=475)	Importance of outcomes Impact of BSU on outcomes Departmental items
2001	Baccalaureate graduates from 1999-2000 (N of responses =477)	Importance of outcomes Impact of BSU on outcomes Departmental items

This short report presents findings across these three areas: importance of outcomes, impact of Boise State on outcomes, and satisfaction with department and major.

What shifts in importance have taken place?

Compared to earlier graduates, recent graduates have placed more importance on their careers and the skills that will make them employable (see Table 1). Recent graduates also felt that defining and solving problems and being able to draw conclusions from data were more important skills than earlier graduates did. While developing effective oral communication skills was rated more highly by recent graduates, written communication skills didn't change, remaining at the top or close to the top in importance. Areas that declined in importance for recent graduates were developing original ideas or products and thinking objectively about beliefs.

Has Boise State's impact on skills development changed across time?

Recent graduates felt Boise State had more impact than prior graduates on developing the skills employers need. Otherwise, there were few consistent changes noted in graduates' ratings of impact (see Table 2). The most consistent finding was that graduates surveyed in 1997 thought Boise State had a greater impact than graduates surveyed either before or after that time.

Have departmental perceptions changed across time?

In general, recent graduates were less satisfied with their departments than were earlier graduates (see Table 3). Generally, graduates surveyed in 1995 and 1997 were more satisfied than

[1] Data from the 1999 survey were lost

graduates surveyed in 1992, 2000, or 2001. In particular, recent graduates were less satisfied with:

- faculty teaching and interest in student welfare
- their major
- times when courses were offered
- communication with faculty
- peer interactions

Implications

Assuming that the pattern of who graduates and who chooses to respond to the survey has remained stable across time, it is clear that recent graduates place a higher value on the skills that directly relate to career. They also have higher expectations for more general skills such as problem-solving and working in teams. These higher expectations, however, are generally not accompanied by perceptions that the university is helping them gain these skills as their perceived importance increases. The one exception is in helping graduates develop the skills that employers need. This implies that internships and courses that provide applications will be especially welcomed by students.

Graduates also are less satisfied with their departments than in the recent past. It is difficult to know what might be behind this decreased satisfaction. It is almost certain, however, that whatever is true for the whole institution will not necessarily be true for individual departments and that individual departments are in the best position to judge the possible "whys" for their own survey results.

Therefore, this report is accompanied by three Excel spreadsheets that include data for individual departments. One spreadsheet provides information on the importance of the outcomes. The second includes details on the impact of Boise State on the outcomes, while the third contains information on the departmental items. Within each spreadsheet are two worksheets. The first worksheet shows the means and standard deviations for the items, while the second sheet provides a legend on the content of the individual items and response options. You are invited to find your department on the spreadsheet and look at your own results. Are your results similar in terms of mean results and patterns across time? What if anything, might be done to shift trends?

Table 1. Outcomes which changed in Importance over time[2]

Outcome	Means[3] by Year of Administration				Interpretation[4]
	1995	1997	2000	2001	
Defining and solving problems (import11)	3.69	3.66	3.81	3.81	2000 & 2001 graduates rated this outcome significantly higher than 1997 and 1995 grads
Developing skills that employers need (import12)	3.62	3.54	3.69	3.68	2000 & 2001 grads rated this outcome significantly higher than1997 grads
Recognizing and using effective oral communication (import13)	3.70	3.75	3.78	3.79	2000 & 2001 grads rated this outcome significantly higher than 1995 grads
Developing and using effective leadership skills (import 14)	3.49	3.50	3.57	3.54	no significant change
Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data (import15)	3.37	3.35	3.51	3.50	2000 & 2001 graduates rated this outcome significantly higher than 1997 and 1995 grads
Recognizing and using effective written communication skills (import16)	3.70	3.71	3.70	3.71	no significant change. Remains tops in importance
Working cooperatively in groups; working as a team member (import17)	3.48	3.49	3.58	3.52	2000 grads rated this outcome significantly higher than 1995 grads
Making effective use of computers & other technology (import18)	N/A	N/A	3.66	3.64	no significant change
Developing original ideas and/or products (import19)	3.48	3.47	3.20	3.25	1995 & 1997 grads rated this outcome significantly higher than 2000 and 2001 grads
Thinking objectively about beliefs, attitudes and values (import20)	3.60	3.67	3.42	3.45	1995 & 1997 grads rated this outcome significantly higher than 2000 and 2001 grads
Making a lifelong commitment to learning (import 21)	3.61	3.66	3.59	3.59	no significant change

[2] A multivariate ANOVA first indicated a significant overall effect ($F=7.55$, $df=39$, $p<.0001$ using Wilks' Lambda)
[3] Response options ranged from 1 (no importance) to 4 (major importance)
[4] Based on a significant F-ratio using $p=.05$ and Tukey's HSD for post hoc comparisons

Outcome	Means[3] by Year of Administration				Interpretation[4]
	1995	1997	2000	2001	
Developing standards for my personal and professional life (import 22)	3.60	3.60	3.59	3.61	no significant change
Meeting the challenges of my career field of choice (import23)	N/A	3.64	3.64	3.75	2001 graduates rated this outcome higher than 2000 or 1997 graduates
Getting along with people from various cultures, races, backgrounds, etc. (import24)	3.51	3.57	3.57	3.58	no significant change
Learning about existing and emerging career options (import25)	3.17	3.09	3.22	3.29	2000 & 2001 graduates rated this outcome significantly higher than 1997 and 1995 grads. In addition, 2001 ratings were higher than 2000 and 1995 ratings, while 1997 ratings were significantly lower.
Understanding the interaction of human beings & the environment (import26)	3.12	3.11	3.17	3.17	no significant change. Remains one of the lowest rated outcomes

Table 2. Outcomes which changed in Impact over time[5]

Outcome	Means[6] by Year of Administration				Interpretation[7]
	1995	1997	2000	2001	
Defining and solving problems (impactt11)	2.94	3.00	2.91	2.90	no significant change
Developing skills that employers need (impact12)	2.64	2.73	2.82	2.77	2000 & 2001 grads rated this outcome significantly higher than1995 grads
Recognizing and using effective oral communication skills (impact13)	2.87	3.00	2.97	2.92	1997 grads rated this outcome higher than 1995 graduates. 2000 & 2001 grads fell in the middle & didn't differ from either group
Developing and using effective leadership skills (impact 14)	2.55	2.62	2.55	2.51	no significant change
Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data (impact15)	2.85	2.99	2.94	2.89	1997 grads rated this outcome higher than 1995 graduates. 2000 & 2001 grads fell in the middle & didn't differ from either group
Recognizing and using effective written communication skills (impact16)	3.11	3.25	3.14	3.09	1997 grads rated this outcome higher than 1995 or 2001 grads. 2000 grads fell in the middle and didn't differ from either group
Working cooperatively in groups; working as a team member (impact17)	3.00	3.03	3.03	3.11	no significant change
Making effective use of computers & other technology (impact18)	N/A	N/A	2.77	2.76	no significant change
Developing original ideas and/or products (impact19)	2.67	2.80	2.32	2.37	1997 grads rated this higher than any other group. 1995 grads rated this higher than 2000 and 2001 grads, who didn't differ from one another
Thinking objectively about beliefs, attitudes and values (impact20)	2.92	3.05	2.63	2.74	1997 grads rated this higher than any other group. 1995 grads rated this higher than 2000 and

[5] A multivariate ANOVA first indicated a significant overall effect ($F=7.67$, $df=42$, $p<.0001$ using Wilks' Lambda)
[6] Response options ranged from 1 (no impact) to 4 (major impact).
[7] Based on a significant F-ratio using $p=.05$ and Tukey's HSD for post hoc comparisons

Outcome	Means[6] by Year of Administration				Interpretation[7]
	1995	1997	2000	2001	
					2001 grads, who didn't differ from one another
Making a lifelong commitment to learning (impact 21)	2.85	3.04	2.83	2.87	1997 grads rated this outcome higher than any other group
Developing standards for my personal and professional life (impact 22)	2.42	2.72	2.50	2.50	1997 grads rated this outcome higher than any other group
Meeting the challenges of my career field of choice (impact23)	N/A	2.74	2.66	2.63	Though F-ratio was significant, post hoc tests were not.
Getting along with people from various cultures, races, backgrounds (impact24)	2.64	2.70	2.63	2.60	no significant change
Learning about existing and emerging career options (impact25)	2.21	2.26	2.24	2.19	no significant change
Understanding the interaction of human beings & the environment (impact26)	2.43	2.63	2.43	2.42	1997 grads rated this outcome higher than any other group

Table 3. Changes in departmental items over time[8]

Item:	Means[9] by Year of Administration					Interpretation[10]
	1992	1995	1997	2000	2001	
Faculty members were genuinely interested in the welfare of students (item1)	3.17	3.25	3.34	3.10	3.06	A. 1997>1992, 2000, 2001 B. 1995>2000,2001 C. 1992>2001
I would advise a friend with similar interests to enroll in the same major (item2)	3.09	3.34	3.30	3.15	3.01	A. 1995 & 1997> 2000, 1992, 2001 B. 2000>2001
Many department/ program courses not offered at the right times for me (item3)	2.93	2.99	2.50	2.50	2.50	A. 1995 & 1992 > 1997, 2000, 2001
A number of courses covered the same material and were redundant (item4)	2.33	2.90	2.20	2.36	2.35	A. 1995> 2000, 2001, 1992, 1997 B. 2000 & 2001 > 1997
If starting over, I would enroll in the same major again (item5)	2.94	3.37	3.16	3.05	2.91	A. 1995> 1997, 2000, 1992, 2001 B. 1997> 1992, 2001
There was good communication between faculty and students regarding student needs/concerns (item6)	2.66	3.02	2.95	2.78	2.82	A. 1995 & 1997 > 2001, 2000, 1992 B. 2001>1992
Many opportunities existed outside of class for interactions between students and faculty (item7)	2.40	3.02	2.69	2.57	2.53	A. 1995> 1997, 2000, 2001, 1992 B. 1997> 2001, 1992 C. 2000> 1992
The interactions and discussions with my peers in the department were a major source of motivation and support (item8)	3.02	3.23	3.09	2.86	2.87	A. 1995> 1997, 1992, 2001, 2000 B. 1997 & 1992>2001, 2000
Faculty were outstanding teachers (item9)	N/A	3.08	3.15	3.00	2.95	A. 1997> 2000, 2001 B. 1995> 2001

[8] A multivariate ANOVA indicated a significant overall effect (F=29.31, df=32, p=<.0001) using Wilk's Lambda
[9] Response options ranged from 1(strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)
[10] Based on a significant F-ratio using p=.05 and Tukey's HSD for post hoc comparisons

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